

Trump is already antagonizing the intelligence community, and that's a problem

By Michael V. Hayden December 12, 2016

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A month ago [I wrote here](#) about the importance and challenge of the intelligence community establishing a relationship with President-elect Donald Trump.

That has just gotten more important and more challenging.

In my November op-ed, I asked: "What role will facts and fact-bearers play in the Trump administration? . . . Which of the president-elect's existing instincts and judgments are open to revision as more data is revealed?"

I had in mind the president-elect's confidence in his own a priori beliefs and specifically his rejection of the intelligence community's judgment that Russia had stolen American emails and weaponized their content to corrode faith in our electoral processes.

The president-elect has been unmoved in his rejection of this high-confidence judgment. In [Time magazine's article](#) last week naming him "Person of the Year," Trump repeated, "I don't believe it. I don't believe they interfered."

Shortly afterward, [The Post reported](#) that CIA analysts now believe the Russian aim was to help Trump win.

Team Trump immediately went into attack mode, employing the bureaucratic equivalent of the ad hominem the president-elect used during the campaign ("Crooked Hillary," "Lyn' Ted," "Little Marco"). "These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction," [its first salvo](#) described the U.S. intelligence community.

Then Republican National Committee communications director Sean Spicer alleged on CNN that “there are people within these agencies who are upset with the outcome of the election.”

Incompetent. Politicized. No need to discuss any further. Move on.

To be fair, the “Russia did it” announcement in October was official and well documented. Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr. attached their reputations to it. This new “Russians did it to help Trump” story was murky, unofficial and tied to anonymous sources.

An administration-in-waiting more confident in itself, in its own legitimacy, in U.S. institutions and in the people it will soon govern might have said, “These are serious issues. We intend to hear them out. Nothing is more precious than our democratic process. We have asked the Obama administration for details.”

The fact that that didn’t happen should invite tons of commentary. But not from me. My narrow concerns as an intelligence officer are the questions raised above. How will this affect the new president’s relationship with the intelligence community?

A lot. And not well.

First is the question of how the incoming administration values intelligence. On Sunday, the president-elect again rejected the Russian role, adding that he was smart enough that he didn’t want or need a daily briefing.

This creates more than hurt feelings. The intelligence community makes great sacrifices, and CIA directors send people into harm’s way to learn things otherwise unavailable. And directors have seen stars carved on the agency’s memorial wall because of it. If what is gained is not used or wanted or is labeled as suspect or corrupt — by what moral authority does a director put his people at risk?

Then there is the ethic of the intelligence profession, captured by the gospel of John’s dictum in the agency’s headquarters lobby — that the truth will set you free.

What happens if the incoming administration directs that the “Russia did it” file be closed? Would standing intelligence requirements to learn more about this be eliminated? And if they were, what would the agency do with relevant data that would inevitably come through its collection network?

And what about the statute that requires the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community to keep Congress “fully and currently informed” about all significant intelligence activities? Data on a foreign power manipulating the federal electoral process would certainly qualify. What will the White House position be when the agency is asked by Congress if it has learned anything more on the issue?

More immediately, what will CIA Director-designate Mike Pompeo say during his confirmation hearings about this? He is not yet director, so he can fairly deflect any questions on the substance of this debate, for now. But every TV set at Langley will be

turned on during his confirmation hearings, and his most important audience will not be the senators on the dais. His future workforce will be looking for clues about his willingness to defend them against charges of incompetence and politicization simply for saying what their craft tells them to be true.

Former CIA director Leon Panetta got great marks from the agency for standing up against elements and actions of the Obama administration when it targeted CIA officers. Case officers and analysts will be looking for evidence they will get the same from Pompeo.

And, finally, how does the intelligence community break through and explain itself to the incoming team?

Can it convincingly make a case that an evidence-based description of Russian actions is not the same thing as an attack on the legitimacy of the president-elect?

Can it explain that, unlike law enforcement that seeks to prove things beyond any reasonable doubt, the purpose of intelligence is to enable meaningful policy and action even in the face of lingering doubt?

And can it demonstrate that the incoming administration should want — rather than discourage — this to better anticipate global trends and adversarial moves in time to reflect and decide on its own actions?

As I wrote last month, intelligence should be called on to create the basis, and set the boundaries, for rational policy choices. That's still true.

The odds that it will happen, though, seem a little bleaker after this past week. And we are moving in the wrong direction.

Read more here:

[Michael V. Hayden: Trump's most important new partner: The intelligence community](#)

[Jennifer Rubin: The Russia story is not about Hillary Clinton](#)

[The Post's View: 'Lessons learned' about Russia](#)
